

Report

“Crisis Stability in South Asia”

September 24, 2013



**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,
ISLAMABAD**

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The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organised an In-House Roundtable on September 24, 2013 with Brig (Retd) Feroz Hassan Khan, lecturer in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California along with his colleague Mr. Ryan French and Ms Meagon Barlow, US Embassy. Welcoming the guests, Director General ISSI, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais said that the Institute was looking forward for this opportunity to get insights into strategic developments in the region and the strategic thinking around the world.

Brig. (R) Feroz Hasan Khan gave a short introduction of his Department at Monterey and informed about the research projects that his Department had been conducting and publishing. He then went on to brief about the results of a workshop on “Crisis Stability in South Asia” that his Department conducted between two groups from India and Pakistan. Brig Feroz said that the workshop was actually a table top crisis simulation exercise held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The basic premise of this exercise was that security stability in South Asia is dubious because there has been no progress on the peace architecture and also due to the presence of transnational networks and their uncontrolled non-state actors. A few years back, India announced its “Cold Start” doctrine and in turn Pakistan also announced that any such move would meet a comprehensive response. In theory, Brig Feroz explained, one can understand the doctrines but the motive of this exercise was to see how it will look like as a war game. For this purpose, two groups were comprised of people from the military as well as civil and academic fields from India and Pakistan. In addition to the two primary groups, there was also a ‘control group’ in order to moderate the exercise. The desired objective of the game was for the two primary groups to achieve war termination in a war scenario between India and Pakistan. Given the fragile security situation in South Asia, the aim of this exercise was to understand how the policy planners in India and Pakistan would respond if another terror attack takes place. Set in the year 2018, the exercise was deemed important as both the countries are nuclear powers and the geo-political environment in the region is changing constantly.

Both the groups were given a crisis triggering event where a terrorist activity has taken place in India during a cricket match and were asked to prepare their war plan.

The Indian team came up with plans that included a swift military action against key infrastructures in Pakistan besides creating a maritime exclusive zone off the Pakistani Makran coast whereas, the Pakistani team sought to internationalise the crisis and present India as an aggressor. The ‘control group’ noted that there was a complete mismatch between Indian and Pakistani low option baseline plan. India wanted to inflict punishment on Pakistan Army across LoC, whereas Pakistan seemed to distance itself and condemn the terror incident in strongest possible terms.

In the case of high options in the exercise, India sought to create a 72-hour window. India decided to create 3 added integrated battle groups from defensive corps to conduct strike from three different locations i.e. Rahim Yar Khan, Sialkot and Lahore. On the other hand, Pakistan thought that India would opt for aerial attack instead of crossing the border and impose a blockade on Karachi and Gwadar port. Pakistan its under high options, decided to conduct aggressive nuclear posturing by missile testing and issuing public statements. Pakistan also decided that its Air Force would support ground and naval operations and Navy would defend sea lanes and interdict Indian ships.

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Several sessions of this exercise were held. Brig (R) Feroz Hasan Khan and Mr. Ryan explained different moves that the Indian and Pakistani strategist made. Key observations noticed over the exercise were that both the countries ignored secondary threats (China for India and Afghanistan for Pakistan). India aimed to resist international pressure for at least 72 hours to achieve its military goals but Pakistan wanted to internationalise the crisis as soon as possible. Pakistan also underestimated India’s low option of hitting Pakistan’s military targets instead of going after terror hideouts as India believed that attacking terror hideouts would not deter Pakistan from supporting non-state actors in future. It was also observed that both India and Pakistan kept ambiguity regarding use of nuclear weapons during the simulated conflict. Interestingly, both the countries knew that they would not cross international border and the escalations will mostly take place in Kashmir.

It was noticed that a limited war had strong chances of escalation into full scale war. Air and maritime actions were considered as equally escalatory. Brig. Feroz while referring to incidents like the Abbottabad operation by the US Navy SEALs also noted that government in Pakistan does not view negligence as complicity and this approach does not go down well with the international community. On the international front, both the countries presented themselves as victims. Brig. (Retd) Feroz also pointed out one of the flaws in Indian planning which was that they attacked Pakistan on LoC but left entire Pakistan Air Force and Navy intact which gave Pakistan an opportunity to give a comprehensive response. The conclusion was that India’s limited war was Pakistan’s total war from the very beginning.

The briefing was followed by a question/answer session. A question was raised regarding the objectives of designing this exercise. Brig Feroz replied that the basic objective of this exercise was to seek clarity of military doctrines and test escalation control. The Director General inquired that if the same exercise was conducted with a different set of people, would the result have been different. Brig. Feroz agreed that the results of this exercise would have been different if a different set of people were selected. However, he also emphasised the fact that the selection of people was carefully done and people who knew about war games were included in this exercise. Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Gul Hanif commented that perhaps Pakistan would always be seen by the international community as an aggressor because India has got hold of Kashmir and will not let it go. This situation has placed Pakistan at a very disadvantageous position. Brig. (Retd) Feroz agreed with the Chairman and said that it was unfortunate that Pakistan has been facing this situation since its creation.

In conclusion, the Director General ISSI thanked Brig. (Retd) Feroz and his colleague for sharing the conclusions of the exercise with ISSI. He also hoped that Brig. (Retd) Feroz would be visiting the Institute on a regular basis to give his insights into the rapidly changing scenario of this region.

- *Prepared by*

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